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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8633
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000241

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2019
TAGS: PTER PGOV ASEC PHUM BA
SUBJECT: SUNNI EXTREMIST PARDONED

REF: A. MANAMA 220
 B. MANAMA 62
 C. MANAMA 83

Classified By: Ambassador Adam Ereli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The King's April 11 mass pardon of security detainees (ref A) included a Sunni extremist who was five weeks from the end of his sentence. It was apparently a gesture toward restive Sunnis backers of the government. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Shura Council member Faisal Fulad confirmed to poloff on April 19 that Adel Saleh was covered by King Hamad's April 11 pardon of 178 security detainees. Saleh was convicted on February 4 on charges of financing terrorism and contact with a terrorist organization (ref B). Fulad believed that Saleh's belated inclusion in the pardon was intended to counter criticism in the Sunni community of the King's decision to pardon high profile Shia agitators Hassan Musheima, Abduljalil Singace, and Mohammed Habib Al Maqdad. He said that immediately after the pardon, Minbar (Muslim Brotherhood) MP Mohammed Khalid posted a message to his blog entitled "No Pardon for You" in which he juxtaposed the pardon of Shia oppositionists with Saleh's conviction and government's inability to secure the release of Bahraini Sunnis being held in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. (Note: The Bahrainis in detention abroad are all being held on security-related charges and include a former Guantanamo detainee. End note.) Fulad opined that the Royal Court responded to this sharp criticism from its Sunni base by clarifying that Saleh, the one Sunni security detainee under Bahraini control, was included in the pardon.

¶3. (C) Comment: Fulad's analysis seems plausible. Many Sunnis responded to the pardon with a mixture of anger and disbelief. The decision to include Saleh was likely intended to mute criticism of the decision, particularly among the Sunni Islamist MPs who constitute the pro-government majority in the lower house of parliament. Saleh was nearing the end of his one-year sentence and would have been released in five weeks, but the pardon cuts short a prosecution appeal for a stiffer sentence (ref C).

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